

Amendments to the Specification:

(1) Please replace paragraph [0002] with the following amended paragraph:

[0002] Semiconductor device geometries continue to dramatically decrease in size. For example, existing semiconductor devices routinely include features having dimensions less than 90 nm. A challenge that has become ever more difficult as this scaling continues has been decreasing interconnect RC time constant delay. Those skilled in the ~~[[are]]~~ art understand that power dissipation due to resistance-capacitance (RC) coupling becomes significant due to increased wiring capacitance, especially interline capacitance between the metal lines on the same metallization level. Smaller line dimensions increase the resistivity of the metal lines and the narrow spacing between the metal lines increases the resulting capacitance. Thus, device speed will increase as dimensions of ultralarge-scale integration devices scale to smaller feature sizes ($<0.25\ \mu\text{m}$).

(2) Please replace paragraph [0025] with the following amended paragraph:

[0025] A cap layer 170 is formed over the second dielectric layer 140. In one embodiment, the cap layer ~~[[150]]~~ 170 comprises silicon nitride or other conventional etch stop or anti-reflective coating materials, and may be deposited by spin-on deposition, dry plasma etching, chemical-vapor-deposition, sputter deposition, thermal deposition, evaporation, physical vapor transport or other conventional or future-developed processes. In another embodiment, the cap layer 170 may comprise carbon nitride that may be similar in composition and manufacture to the carbon nitride passivation layer 130 described above. In the illustrated embodiment, the cap layer 170 includes a carbon nitride layer 172 and a silicon nitride layer 174. As with the passivation layer 130, employing carbon nitride as at least a portion of the cap layer 170 can provide increased mechanical stability, increased resistance to moisture entrapment and lower tensile stress. The cap layer 170 may have a thickness that ranges between about 50 Angstroms and about 800 Angstroms.